



The Rt Hon Lucy Frazer KC MP
Secretary of State
Department for Culture, Media and Sport
100 Parliament Street
London
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Dear Secretary of State,

I am writing to you on behalf of the many thousands of freelancers who work in film and TV and who are members of Bectu, the UK's union for the creative industries.

Bectu appreciates the support that you have shown the industry while in this role, including reviewing and extending tax relief to encourage inward investment and championing the UK as a great place for film and TV production, due to both the extensive studio space but also the excellent skills and creativity of the crew (our members). Like you, we are incredibly proud of the sector and its huge economic and cultural contribution is undeniable.

You have recently made several references to the UK's booming creative industries, and film and TV in particular. Whilst I appreciate that you were referencing 2022 figures, the harsh reality for tens of thousands of industry workers is far from the production boom of 2022.

I attach our new report, out today, based on a poll of over 4,000 industry workers earlier this month. The results make for very worrying reading. Despite your assertions of a booming industry, our report outlines a shocking drought of work and debilitating financial and mental health challenges for much of the workforce.

When we last surveyed the workforce in September 2023, amidst industrial action in the US, three quarters reported being out of work. Five months on, the situation has barely improved and in some regards is worse. 68% of respondents are currently not working, only a tiny decrease from September 2023 (74%).

In some parts of the country, the lack of employment opportunities is even more pronounced. Those currently working drops to just 18% in the East Midlands and 21% in the North East – running contrary to the government's levelling up agenda.

The findings also show a clear existential threat to the industry and a step backwards in industry diversity. The number of people planning to leave the industry within the next five years has risen – from 24% in September 2023 to 37% in February 2024. These figures are even higher for women, those from ethnic minority backgrounds, and those working in unscripted TV.

The pandemic exposed for the whole industry the vulnerability of the workforce when times become tough, and work dries up. Far too many freelancers fell between the gaps of Covid-related government support schemes, and many workers tell us the current situation is even worse.

I wanted to share just a few responses from our survey:

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"I feel abandoned. I've dedicated my life to this career and overnight everything I've worked towards has fallen apart."

"To have given up so much of my life to working in TV (long hours, stressful contracts, weeks away from home) only to find myself finding it impossible to now get work, is the most soul-destroying part. This is the lowest I've ever felt, and completely hopeless for the future. And what is worse is seeing so many others saying the same thing."

"I'm scared. A career I've worked so hard for, as an ethnic minority working mum, it's all for nothing. As freelancers we're told it's part of the risk of choosing this job we're 'so lucky' to have. Yet what do we have to show for it? Nothing. No pension. No career. No future. Starting from scratch in my mid 40s with a mortgage and children that depend on me. It feels like redundancy without any severance package."

You can read further reflections from the workforce in our report.

A huge 88% are concerned about their financial security over the next six months, a sentiment echoed in the Film and TV Charity's recent 'Money Matters' report, which found that less than one in ten workers are optimistic about their financial future.

Not surprisingly, three quarters of the workforce is struggling with their mental health, and this is hitting young workers hardest. The 'boom and bust' nature of the industry is leaving freelancers hugely exposed and vulnerable, with no safety net, so only the wealthiest can survive.

I hope you will agree that the current picture for the UK screen industries is deeply concerning. There is a clear need to better, and urgently, support the freelance workforce.

Bectu stands ready to engage with industry and government but we need firm and decisive leadership from DCMS to properly tackle this crisis.

With that in mind, I ask you to convene an urgent industry summit, bringing together broadcasters, industry stakeholders and government, to discuss the crisis and possible solutions.

The future of our much loved and globally revered film and TV industry, and one of the UK's economic heavyweights, depends on urgent and joined up action. The workforce, who underpin the sector's success, must have a seat at the table.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Philippa Childs". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Philippa Childs, Head of Bectu